

Australian Rainforest Fruits: A Field Guide

by Wendy Cooper; illustrations by William T. Cooper

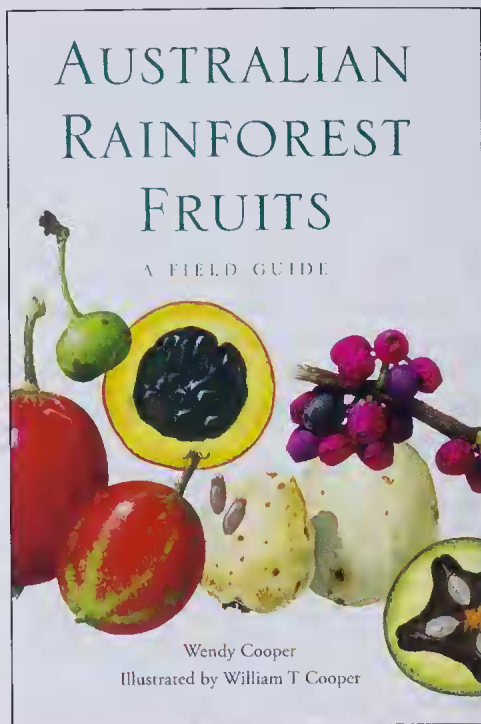
Publisher: CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, 2013. 272 pages, paperback, colour illustrations. ISBN 9780643107847. RRP \$59.95

Judging by its colourful cover, I half hoped to find delicious native fruit salad recipes within this book, but, instead, I found a vividly illustrated field guide to Australia's rainforest fruits. As a Research Associate at the Australian Tropical Herbarium, Wendy Cooper studies taxonomy of various rainforest plants. In fact, this field guide is ostensibly a concise extraction of Cooper's more detailed *Fruits of the Australian Tropical Rainforest*, published in 2004. Her husband, William T. Cooper, began his career as a landscape and seascape artist in 1964 and is well known and acclaimed for his natural history art.

The book provides a guide to 504 fruiting species found in the rainforests of Eastern Australia. Most species are common and widespread but a few rare yet familiar species make appearances. The book is laid out simply with large, detailed illustrations of each fruit.

The introduction gives the user a brief understanding of how to use the guide, and stresses that many rainforest species are poisonous although they may appear edible. The key to the guide is simple to use: fruits are categorised by colour. Within each colour category, fruits are arranged by form and size. Here the key uses vocabulary that may be slightly advanced for the layman, but this is a non-issue as the guide itself explains terms such as 'aril', 'calyx' and 'indehiscent pods' through its detailed images and a glossary.

The species are grouped into five main colour-of-ripeness categories: pink to purple, blue to black, yellow and orange to red, green and brown and shades of white. Colour strips on the edges of the pages are user friendly and lead the reader to concise descriptions of each plant. Each species is described by its common name (if it has one) as well as its scientific name. Details of the size of the fruit, number and size of its seeds and the time at which it is ripe are provided. Images of the leaves and their ar-



rangements are given as well as explanations of the key features of the species. The distribution is described using a simple map and short description. The illustrations are labelled and provide a comprehensive visual representation of each fruit at different angles, with examples of fruits opening to expose seeds and, sometimes, cross sections. This gives the advantage of being able to identify fruits should they vary from the herbarium example at the time of observation. Scale is provided at the bottom of each page.

A checklist of all fruiting rainforest plants of eastern Australia (excluding orchids) appears at the back of the book, and a glossary clarifies the botanical terms mentioned in the key. An index directs the reader to pages based on both scientific and common names.

The information in this comprehensive yet concise field guide is presented in a logical way, though it may be foreign to the botanist who is accustomed to searching for plants according to distribution or family.

As the book attests, field guides are valuable for those interested in beginning to develop their identification skills and may then add to their research from there. This example is particularly well presented and simple to use. The descriptions are well written and the reader rapidly gains an understanding of the species they encounter

in the field. The illustrations are absolutely beautiful and very charming, making this book not only practical, but a delight to own.

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